

# Dolores Huerta and The United Farm Workers Movement

## OVERVIEW

### ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Who is Dolores Huerta, what role did she play in the United Farm Workers movement, and how is she recognized today?

### OVERVIEW

*In this lesson, students will explore the life and legacy of Civil Rights Icon Dolores Huerta. In addition to listening to the traditional Spanish song “De Colores,” they will listen to Alice Bag’s song “A Street Called Dolores Huerta,” which was inspired by a poem by Nikki Darling, and compare it with the poem “Huelga” written by Diana Garcia.*



Migrant labor has been essential for the agricultural industry in western states such as California, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, or New Mexico. In the 20th century, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Mexican immigrants performed much of the agricultural work in the western United States. The Bracero Program alone brought 5 million Mexican workers to the U.S. from 1942 to 1964 in an effort to solve labor shortages caused by World War II. Agricultural work was low-paid, physically demanding, and dangerous. The workers and their families lived in poverty and lacked educational opportunities. They faced violence and discrimination when they sought fair treatment and reasonable living conditions.

Cesár Chávez (1927-1993) and Dolores Huerta (1930-) were the children of agricultural workers and were familiar with the challenges they faced. Chávez had even dropped out of school in the 8th grade in order to work to support his family. Both Chávez and Huerta were deeply committed to community organizing and fighting social and economic injustice. Together, in 1962 they launched the union that became known as the United Farm Workers to establish better pay and working conditions. The UFW understood that although the workers were very poor, they were able to wield significant power at the ballot box, through grassroots organization, and through boycotts. Over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, the UFW made great gains for workers’ rights by establishing disability insurance for farmworkers, fighting the use of dangerous pesticides, raising wages, and eventually passing the Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975, which granted farmworkers the right to collectively organize. The farmworkers’ movement became so influential that Miriam Powell called it “the Civil Rights movement of the West.”

One of the UFW’s most successful actions was the National Boycott of California Table Grapes, which began as a Filipino workers’ strike in 1965. To support the strike, the UFW organized a boycott of table grapes. Dolores Huerta’s organizational skills were instrumental to this effort.

She led picket lines and traveled to cities across the country to publicize the boycott and encourage the public not to buy grapes without union labels. The cause was boosted by the Civil Rights movement, which had increased public awareness regarding lowered standards of living for victims of racism and prejudice. Civil rights organizations, faith groups, student activists, and even politicians such as Robert F. Kennedy brought attention to the UFW's cause. Soon, millions of consumers had joined the boycott and stopped buying table grapes. As a result, grape growers signed the first union contracts and brought social justice to agricultural labor. Yet while the United Farm Workers movement vastly improved working conditions, agricultural workers today still face low pay and high levels of discrimination and violence. They are still predominantly migrant workers and are often exploited by their employers, who ignore labor laws and fair practices.

Dolores Huerta faced particular challenges as a woman in the predominantly male space of politics. For Huerta, fighting for gender equality was just as important as fighting for social and economic equality. Huerta fought gender discrimination within the UFW, where women were often constrained by the traditional views and gender expectations of their fathers or husbands. Huerta advocated for the participation of the entire family in the movement. After all, she argued, men, women, and children worked in the fields together. Following Huerta, women devoted their efforts to organizing at a grassroots level by joining the picket lines, organizing marches and boycotts, rallying for changes to legislation and policy, and registering Latinos to vote. Many of the tactics that the UFW pioneered have been adapted by other groups, from environmentalists to advocates for immigrants' rights. Huerta's slogan, "*¡Si se puede!*" ("Yes we can!"), was even adopted by President Barack Obama in his presidential campaign.

Music played a central role in the grassroots efforts of the UFW. Songs provided a sense of community and connection for the movement, as the workers would sing at union meetings and as they marched or stood on the picket line. Some of the songs, such as "De Colores" or "Solidarity Forever," were traditional Spanish and American folk songs. Other songs, such as "El Picket Sign," were written expressly for the movement by the Teatro Campesino, the cultural arm of the United Farm Workers. Music has also played a role in commemorating the movement and in recognizing Huerta's important contributions over sixty years of activism.

## OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

### 1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- The conditions that led to the United Farm Workers of America's movement for labor rights in the 1960s and 1970s
- The role played by Dolores Huerta in the United Farm Workers movement in securing labor rights for agricultural workers
- The significance of the United Farm Workers movement as a historical event
- How the work of Dolores Huerta and the United Farm Workers continues to impact the United States today
- Musician Alice Bag's performance of "A Street Called Dolores Huerta," inspired by the poem by Nikki Darling

### 2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be able to describe the events that led to the United Farm Workers movement and Dolores Huerta's important and impactful contributions to Civil Rights.

## ACTIVITIES

### MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Show **Image 1, Grapes**, with the class. Then ask students to do a Quick Write to document as much information and as many adjectives that describe the subject of the photo as they can in two minutes.
2. Show students **Image 2, Two Photographs**. Ask students:
  - What do you think is happening in these photographs?
  - What might the word "Huelga" mean? (If needed, share that this word means "Strike" in Spanish.)
  - Why do you think people in the field are carrying those signs?
  - Why do you think the store in the photo is offering free grapes?
3. Show students **Image 3, Grocery Store Produce**. Ask students:
  - Where do the fruits and vegetables that we buy at the grocery store come from?
  - Who might harvest this produce?

- What challenges do you think that these people (who are called farm workers) face every day?
4. Tell students that they will be learning about the United Farm Workers, a group of farm workers who struggled for labor rights, the woman who championed their cause and brought about change, and the lasting impact of her work.

## PROCEDURE

1. Pass out **Handout - Vocabulary Terms**. In groups, individually, or as a class, read through the terms and answer the questions.
2. Show students this video (from 1:28 to 3:49) from the PBS Series *Latino Americans* (<https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/df492426-ffec-4eef-bed1-caca19c08b41/the-farm-worker-movement/>) to introduce them to the United Farm Workers. Ask students:
  - What were the conditions like for farmworkers? As a class, make a list of the hardships that they faced.
  - Who was César Chávez?
  - Who was Dolores Huerta?
  - Why did Chávez and Huerta decide to form a union? How might a union help the situation of the agricultural workers?
  - What challenges did Dolores Huerta face because she was a woman?
3. Tell students that between 1965 and 1970, Chávez and Huerta helped form the United Farm Workers, which educated people on poor working conditions of farm workers who harvested grapes. This led to a boycott of grapes in California and across the USA. In 1966, Dolores Huerta organized a march from the grape growing region of Delano, California, to Sacramento, the state capitol. Farm Workers gathered and marched over 300 miles together. It took them 25 days to complete the march. The tireless efforts of Dolores Huerta and the United Farm Workers educated the American people to the plight of farm workers and brought important changes to their lives.
4. Show students this video from the PBS Series *Latino Americans* (from 13:02 to 14:56) (<https://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/df492426-ffec-4eef-bed1-caca19c08b41/the-farm-worker-movement/>) of marchers arriving in Sacramento. Ask students:
  - How might have Dolores Huerta inspired so many people to march with her and Cesar Chávez?
  - Why was this march a success?
  - Imagine that you were one of the marchers. How would you have felt when you arrived in Sacramento?
  - Imagine that you were the Governor of California. What might have been going through your mind as you saw these marchers arrive at the state capitol?
  - Does the March to Sacramento remind you of other marches or protests?
5. Show **Image 4, Two Marches**. Ask students:
  - Do you recognize any of the people in these photographs?
  - How are these famous leaders similar?

Based on what you know about Martin Luther King, Jr. and what you are learning about Dolores Huerta, do you think they shared the same goals?

- Why do you think that these leaders used non-violent marches to bring attention to the changes they wanted to see?
  - What do you notice that is different about the photo of the UFW March? (*Elicit that there are women and children present. This was Dolores Huerta's idea. An idea which personalized the protest and helped people see that families were affected by unfair labor practices.*)
6. Explain that the Mexican Folk Song “De Colores” became the United Farm Workers’ anthem. This traditional song was already familiar to many people, but took on new meaning when it was paired with the movement to bring fair wages and better working conditions to farm workers. “De Colores” was often sung at United Farm Worker gatherings, marches, and rallies.
7. Play the **Clip 1, “De Colores”**, and invite students to sing along if they already know this popular folk song. Then ask students:
- Do you think this song was a good choice for the UFW to adopt as their anthem? Why?
  - Have you heard other songs that are sung at marches or protests? How is this song different?
  - To you, what might the lyrics “De colores, De colores es el arco iris que vemos lucir.” (“In colors, in colors / Is the rainbow that we see shining”) mean? How might they be inspiring for

the people singing the song?

- Tell students that at the end of the song, people would shout “*¡Si se puede!*” (“Yes we can!”). Why might this song be powerful for people singing the song?
8. Show students **Image 5, President Obama “¡Si se puede!” Campaign Sign**. Tell students that when Barack Obama ran for president in 2008, he used the phrase “*¡Si se puede!*”. He went on to win the election and served as the US President for eight years. Ask students:
- Why do you think that Barack Obama felt that this phrase was important to his campaign?
  - How did this phrase bring people together?
  - Do you think that the phrase “*¡Si se puede!*” may have helped Barack Obama become President? Why or why not?
9. Show students **Image 6, Dolores Huerta Awarded the Medal of Freedom**. Tell students that in 2012, Dolores Huerta was awarded the Medal of Freedom, the highest honor that a president can bestow upon a civilian. (*Students may need an explanation of the terms “bestow” and “civilian.”*) Read the quote from the image aloud as a class. Then ask:
- How does President Obama show his admiration for Dolores Huerta in this speech?
  - What does President Obama mean when he says “she has fought to give more people a seat at the table”?

- How might have Huerta felt at this moment?
10. Show students **Clip 2, “A Street Called Dolores Huerta,”** featuring Alice Bag performing the song “A Street Called Dolores Huerta,” with lyrics inspired by a poem written by Nikki Darling. Ask students to listen closely to the lyrics. After the video, ask students:
- According to this song, why should a street be named after Dolores Huerta? (*students can refer to the lyrics to draw contextual evidence for their answers*)
  - Does the music remind you of any other type of music you have heard or seen? (*Note that the musicians accompanying Bag are Trio La Victoria, a group inspired by traditional Mexican Mariachi music.*)
  - Do you agree that a street should be named for Dolores Huerta? Why or why not?
  - How might have Alice Bag felt about having Dolores Huerta in the audience as she sang this song?
11. Show students **Image 7 - “Huelga”**. Pass out to students **Handout - Huelga**, Diana García. Read the poem featured in the handout aloud as a class, or have students read the handout or read aloud in small groups. Then ask students:
- How is Dolores Huerta portrayed in Diana Garcia’s poem?
  - Do you think the poem provides a good description of the photograph? In your opinion, what are some of the words in the poem that describes the photograph well?
  - Compare this poem to the song performed by Alice Bag. What similarities and differences can you identify?
12. Display **Image 8, Dolores Huerta Square Dedication**. Tell students that Nikki Darling’s poem and Alice Bag’s performance helped lead to the inauguration of Dolores Huerta Square in East Los Angeles in 2019. The above photo captures the dedication of Dolores Huerta Square.
13. Display **Image 9, Dolores Huerta Quote**. Ask students to do another Quick Write and to write as many adjectives that they can think of to describe Dolores Huerta. Have students share their words with a partner or create a list of words as a class. Then ask students:
- What have you learned about Dolores Huerta?
  - Why was her work important? How did Dolores Huerta lead the way for women and marginalized people?
  - Do you think that Dolores Huerta’s work continues to be important today?

## SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Share the following two summary activities and encourage students to choose the order in which to complete them:
  - Invite students to write a Haiku about Dolores Huerta. (A Haiku is a poem with three lines, each with a specific number of syllables. The first line is five syllables, the second line is seven syllables, and the third line is five syllables.)



- Show **Image 10, Shepard Fairey Illustration Examples**. Tell students that the illustrations they are looking at are from Shepard Fairey, who also provided inspiration for President Obama’s and the “We The People” campaign. Ask students to identify the color palette of these posters (red, aqua, navy blue, and off white) and the portrait style. Challenge students to create their own “¡Si se puede!” Poster by creating a self portrait in the style of Shepard Fairey. These posters could be created using watercolor markers, black sharpie, crayons, colored pencil and/or paint.

### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Ask students to write a letter to the Dolores Huerta Foundation in which they describe what they have learned about Civil Rights icon Dolores Huerta, and how this lesson has impacted them. You can find information on writing a friendly letter here: <https://www.letterwritingguide.com/friendlyletterformat.htm>. Letters can be sent to:

Dolores Huerta Foundation  
P.O. Box 2087  
Bakersfield, CA 93303

2. Ask students to view this Google Arts and Culture Exhibit (<https://artsandculture.google.com/exhibit/one-life-dolores-huerta-national-portrait-gallery/ygLC-xrhjA9CIA?hl=en>), then create their own animated slide deck featuring information on Dolores Huerta.



## STANDARDS

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS***College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading (K-12)*

Reading 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Reading 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

Craft and Structure 4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity 10: Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

*College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing (K-12)*

Text Types and Purposes 2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Production and Distribution of Writing 4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge 9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

*College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language (K-12)*

Language 1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Language 2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.





Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use 6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when encountering an unknown term important to comprehension or expression.

### *College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening (K-12)*

Speaking and Listening 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Speaking and Listening 2: Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Presentation of Knowledge 4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

## **SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)**

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change

Theme 3: People, Place, and Environments

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 6: Power, Authority, and Governance

Theme 7: Production, Distributions, and Consumption

Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

## **NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION**

### *Core Music Standard: Responding*

Interpret: Support interpretations of musical works that reflect creators' and/or performers' expressive intent.



Evaluate: Support evaluations of musical works and performances based on analysis, interpretation, and established criteria.

*Core Music Standard: Connecting*

Connecting 11: Relate musical ideas and works to varied contexts and daily life to deepen understanding.



## RESOURCES

### VIDEOS

- “De Colores”
- “A Street Called Dolores Huerta”

### HANDOUTS

- Handout - Introducing Vocabulary
- Handout - *Huelga*, Diana García